DARK HORSE 20 YEARS

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

122 $2.99 US

BAREFOOT 1 OF 5

HIROAKI SAMURA

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

color pinup by

DAN HIPP

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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by **DANA LEWIS**
lettering and retouch by **TOMOKO SAITO**
front cover colors by **DAN JACKSON**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI

Immortal *rōnin*, vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge.

RIN

Last heir of the Mutentchi-*ryū dōjō* which was destroyed by the Ittō-*ryū*.

HABAKI KAGIMURA

Powerful *bangashira*, serving the shogun and seeking the secret of immortality.

DŌA

Dōa, an Ittō-*ryū* warrior, is slowly befriending Rin, with neither of them knowing their real connection.

ISAKU

Dōa's trusted bodyguard and member of the Ittō-*ryū*.

BURANDO

Deranged medical examiner, returned to prison by a disappointed Kagimura.

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Imprisoned in an underground cell, Manji is an unwilling participant in Habaki Kagimura's "immortality experiments." Burando, Kagimura's lead medical examiner, fails to transfer the powers of the *kessen-chu* to another human and is thrown into prison after losing his nerve and his grip on reality. Separated from both Manji and Isaku, with the Edo police on their tails, Rin does her best to comfort Dōa and plan their next move.

designer **SCOTT COOK** editorial assistant **RYAN JORGENSEN**
editor **PHILIP SIMON** publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

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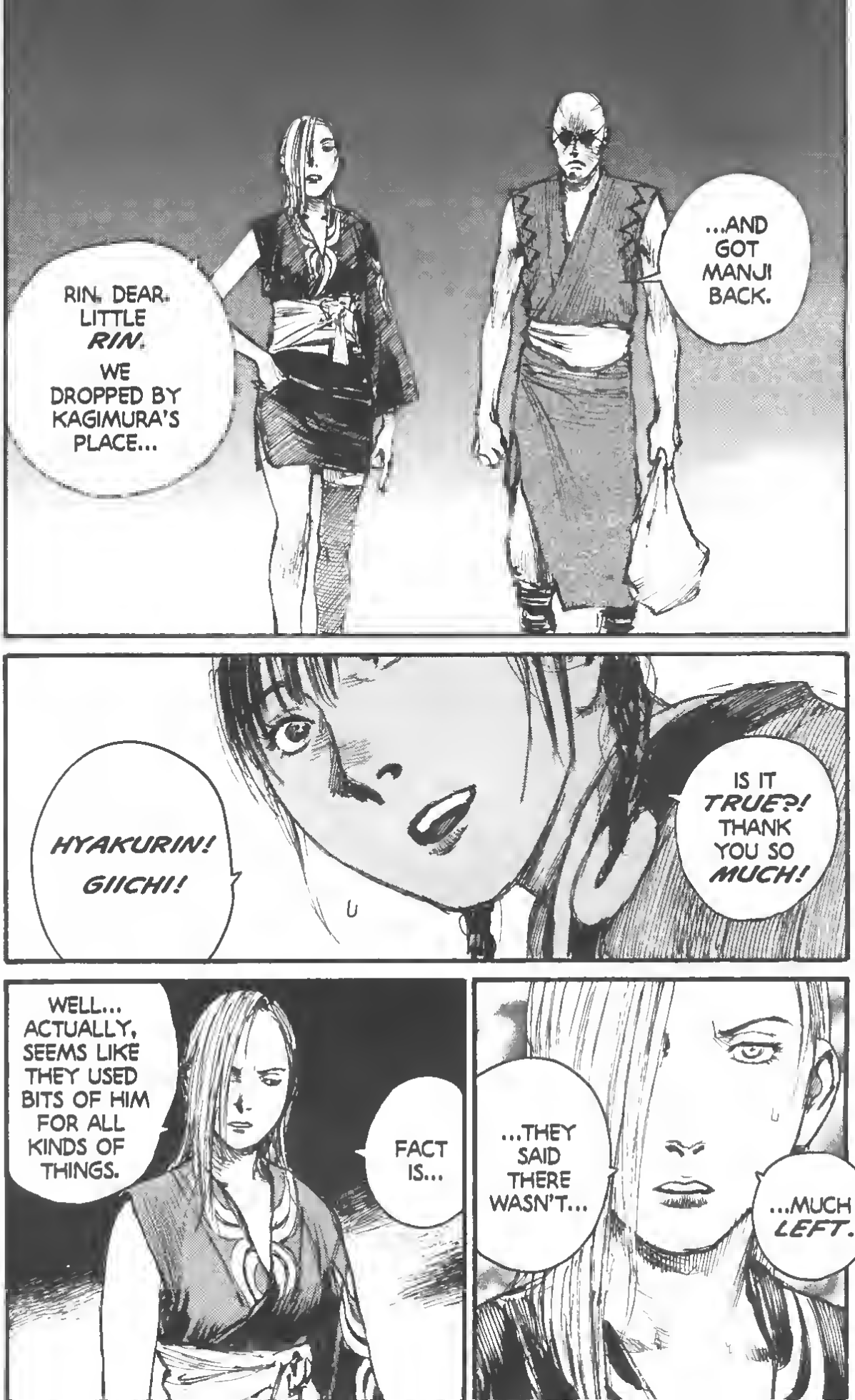
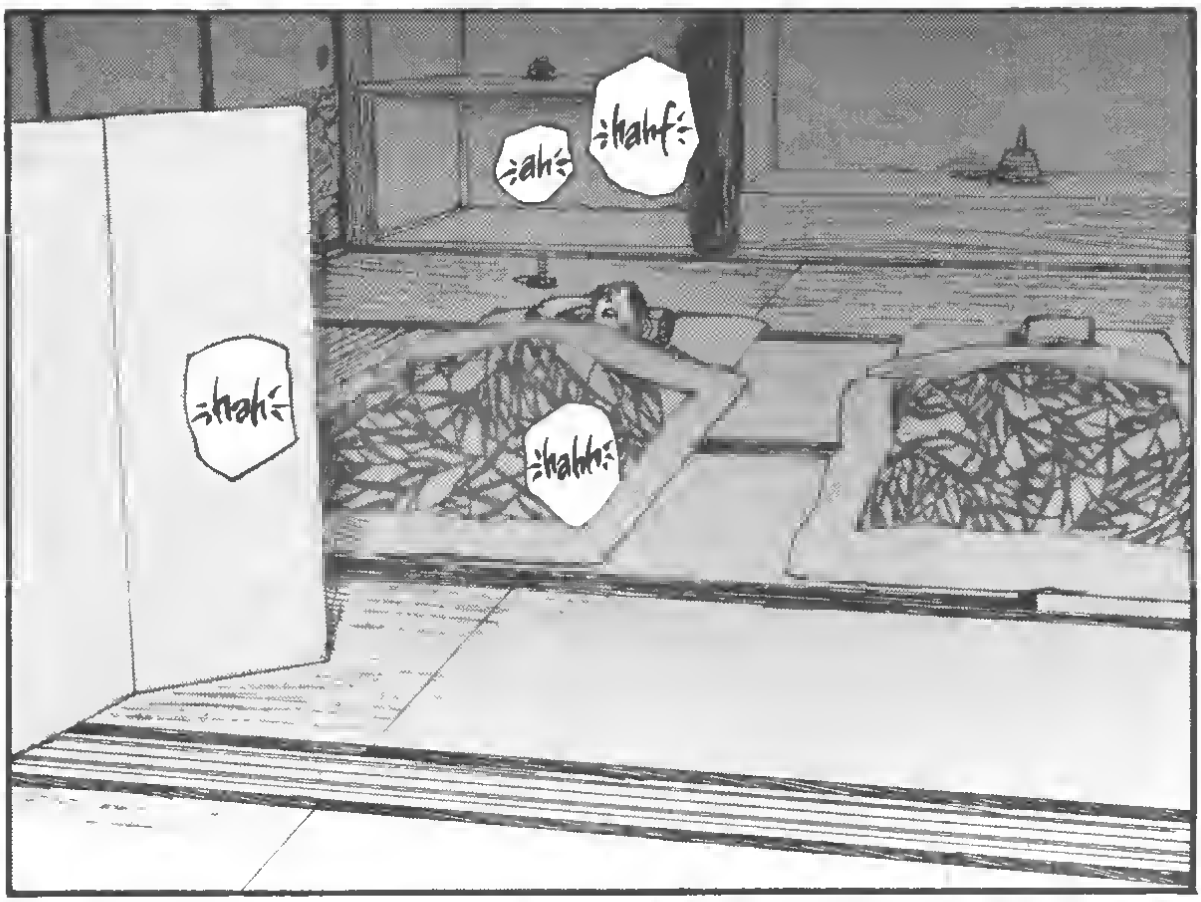
無限の住人

BAREFOOT

-part one-


RIN. DEAR. LITTLE *RIN.* WE DROPPED BY KAGIMURA'S PLACE...
...AND GOT MANJI BACK.
HYAKURIN! GIICHI!
IS IT *TRUE*?! THANK YOU SO *MUCH!*
WELL... ACTUALLY, SEEMS LIKE THEY USED BITS OF HIM FOR ALL KINDS OF THINGS.
FACT IS...
...THEY SAID THERE WASN'T...
...MUCH *LEFT.*

EH?
LEFT? WHAT DO YOU MEAN...?
BUT, HEY, WE DECIDED TO TAKE WHAT THEY HAD.
THE MAN'S IMMORTAL, SO THIS SHOULD DO.
HERE.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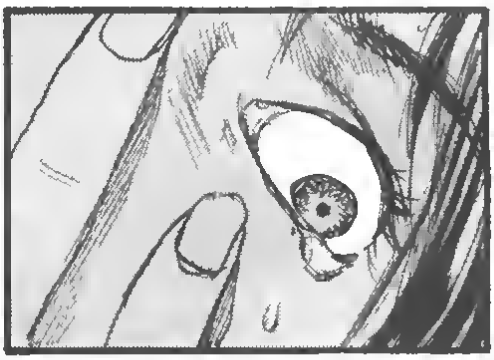
DIDN'T HAPPEN, WON'T HAPPEN... RIGHT?!



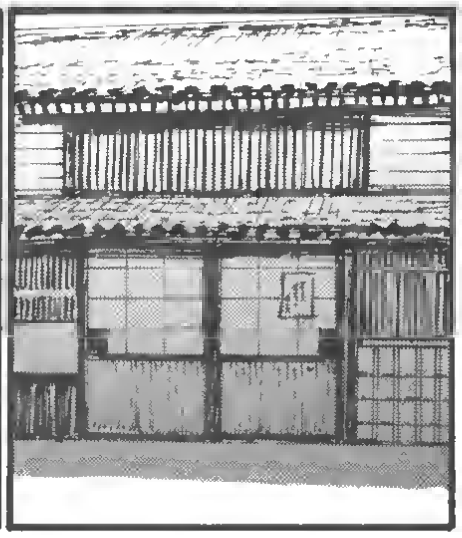
D...
D...
DŌA?!
NGN...
MNG...
.....
.....
.....
WHUP!
THUP THUP
...WHAT
A
SHOCK!

I'M THINKING ABOUT CHECKING OUT THE PRISON IN *KODENMA-CHŌ*.
DŌA.

WHEN THEY BRING FOLKS IN...

...FIRST THEY QUESTION THEM AT THE *ŌBAN-YA*...
...BUT IF *THAT* DOESN'T CLEAR THEM, THEY SEND THEM TO PRISON.

I DON'T KNOW WHERE ISAKU-SAN IS NOW. BUT WE DO KNOW...
...THEY'LL DRAG HIM TO KODENMA-CHŌ SOON.
AND, BY THE WAY...
...WE ARE NOT GOING THERE TO KILL.

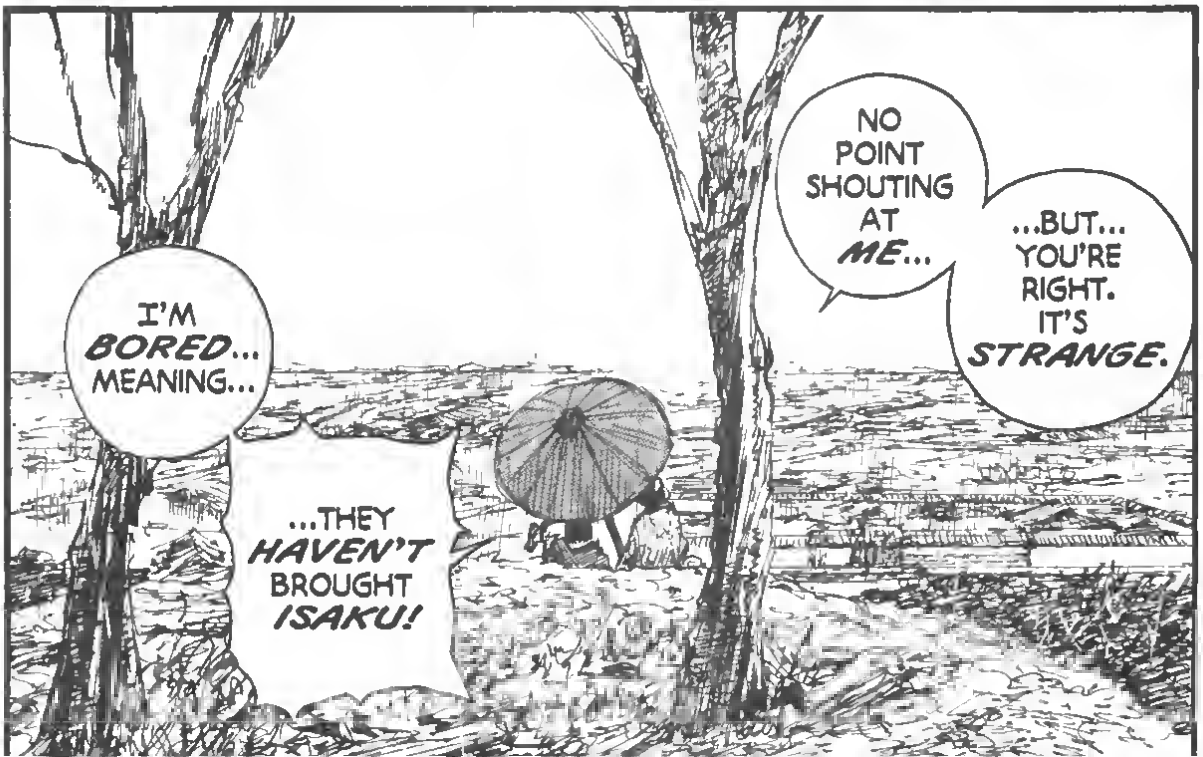


THE CITY'S SO... QUIET.
NOT SURPRISING, I GUESS, WITH ALL THE COPS OUT LATELY...
...ON THE SURFACE, EVERY-THING'S CALM AND SERENE...
...BUT I CAN FEEL A CERTAIN TENSION ALL OVER TOWN.
SIGNS. KNIFE GRINDING BONE SETTING

WHAT'S *THAT*?!
MY SECRET WEAPON. A *TŌMI-ZUTSU*.
I BORROW-ED IT FROM A PAINTER FRIEND.

GIMME! GIMME!
OKAY, BUT WAIT A-- HEY!! BE GENTLE WITH IT!
MONEY CAN'T BUY SOME-THING LIKE THIS!
THAT'S RIGHT. FOCUS ON THE GATE.
IF THEY BRING ISAKU, NOTE WHICH BLOCK HE'S IN.
WOW!!
EVEN IF HE'S KIRISHITAN, THEY WON'T TORTURE HIM RIGHT AWAY.
WE'LL FIGURE OUT HOW TO SPRING HIM THE VERY SAME DAY.
IT'LL ALL WORK OUT. AS LONG AS...
...YOU STAY CARE-FUL.

FOUR DAYS LATER...

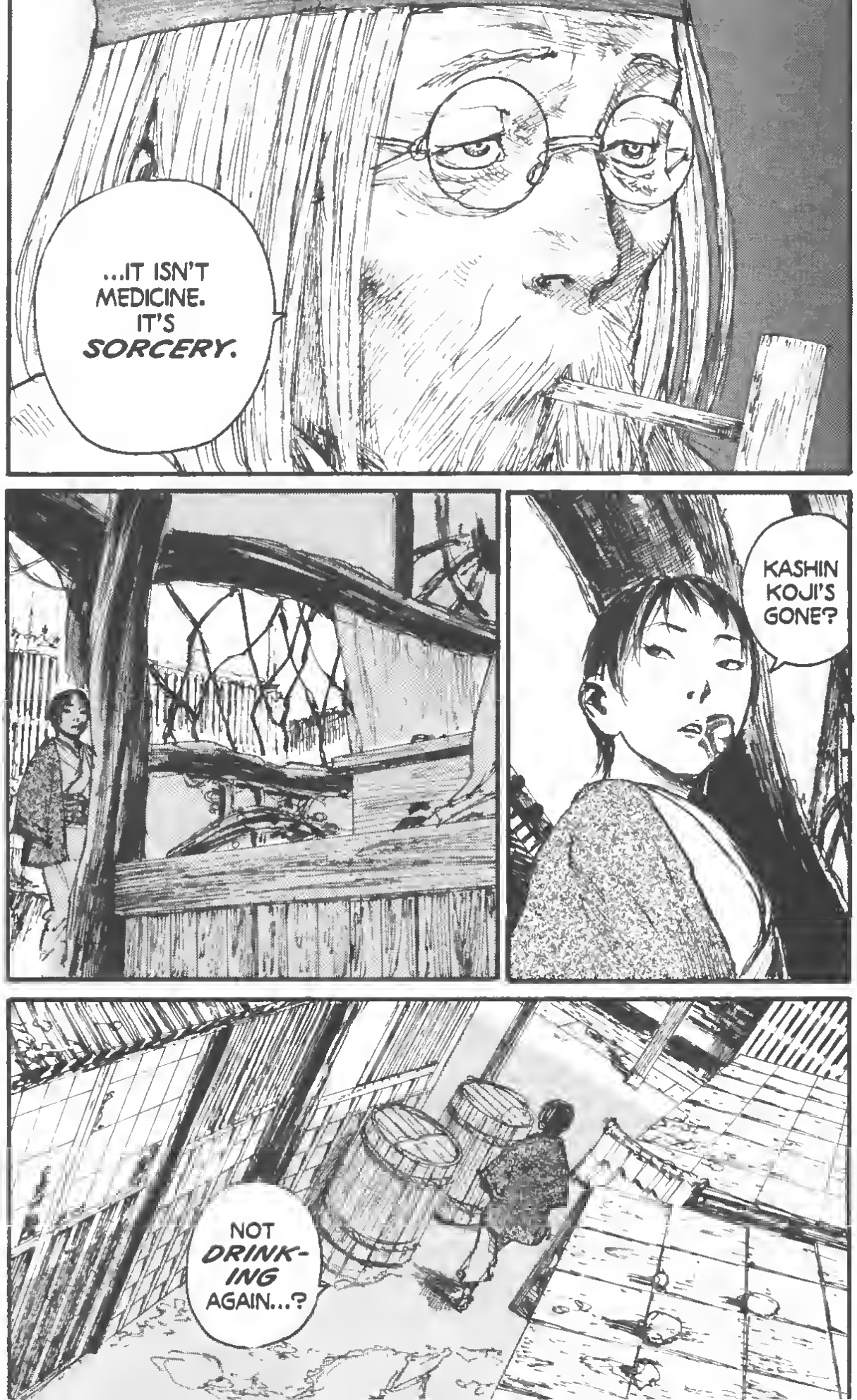


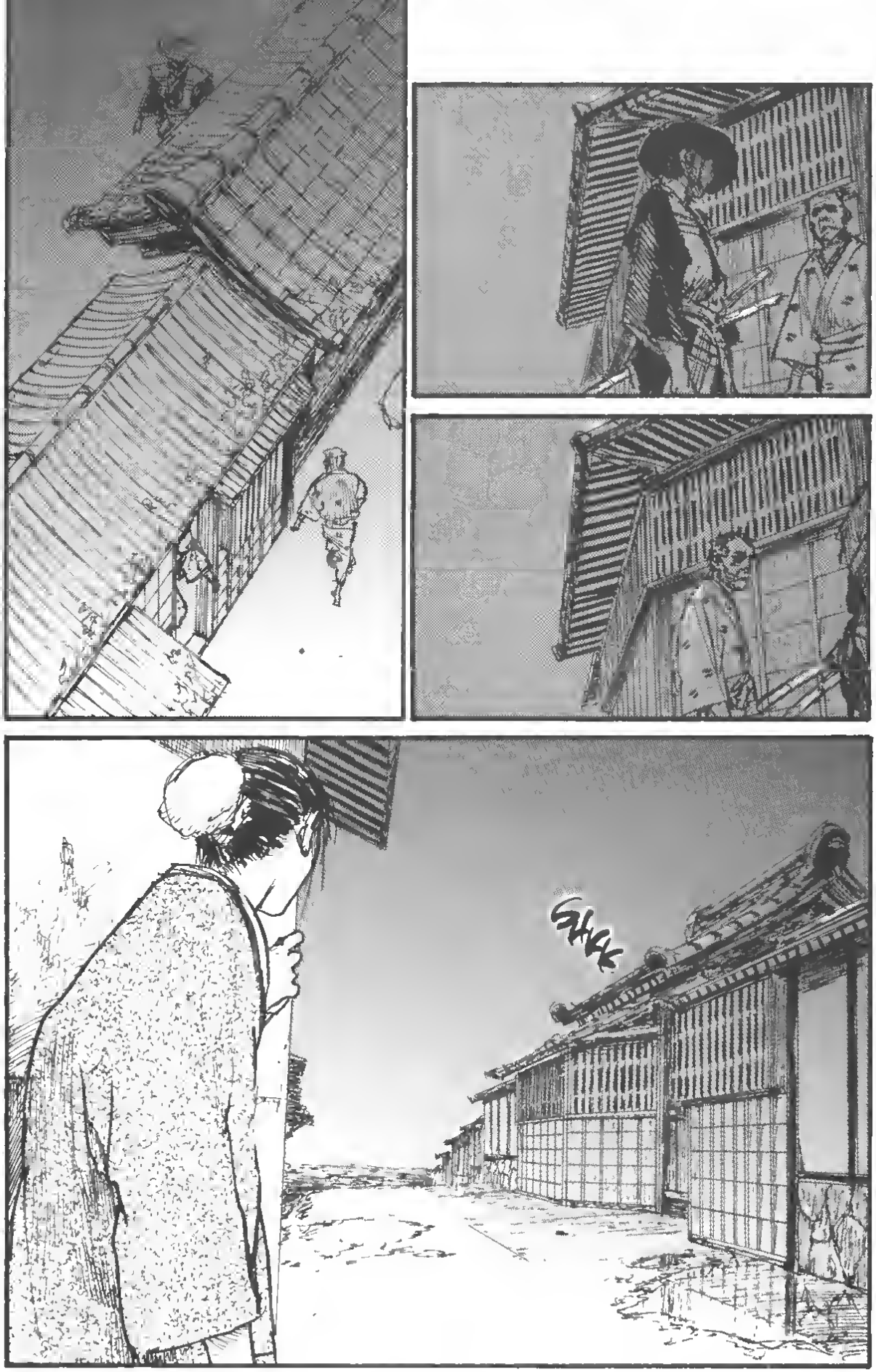
THEY HAVEN'T HAULED IN ANY-BODY...
...FOR FOUR DAYS STRAIGHT. GUESS THAT'S A GOOD THING, BUT...
.....
.....
THEN WHERE'S ISAKU?
...RIN. I NEED TO GO...
...SOME WHERE.
I'M GOING TO ASK THIS GEEZER I KNOW.
OH. OKAY.
SO... SHE DOES HAVE FRIENDS...?

I'VE GOT A FEELING I'LL NEVER FIND ISAKU IF I STICK WITH YOU.
THIS NEVER WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF YOU HADN'T GONE ALL CRAZY!
WELL-- THANKS A HEAP!
THAP THAP THAP
...hmph!
JUST DO AS YOU PLEASE!
I'VE GOT A MOUNTAIN OF STUFF TO DO!
5
IT'S NOT THAT I'M NARROW-MINDED, HEAVEN'S NO!
A MAN OF MY AGE, I'M MORE THAN WILLING!

SOME YOUNG MAN SHOWS TALENT, GROWTH POTEN-TIAL...
...I GLADLY LET HIM TAKE CREDIT, I DO.
...KNOCK-ING ON MY DOOR.
HMM, I'M AN HERBAL-IST. DON'T GET MANY YOUNG TURKS...
RIGHT, DOCTOR? SURELY YOU'VE BEEN THERE YOURSELF?
I ALMOST ENVY YOUR PANIC, YOU GOTEN-I, REALLY.
P-PANIC?! NOW, DOCTOR!
IT'S NOT THAT! I'M SAYING, JUST TALENT ALONE...?
AH! YES, THE LAD NEEDS EXPERIENCE, MM?
YES! YES! THAT'S IT EXACTLY !!

HE'S BACK FROM TAISEI? SO WHAT?!
WHAT'D THE LITTLE SQUIRT LEARN IN TAISEI?!
CHOPPING UP CORPSES, STICKING 'EM TOGETHER ANY WHICH WAY, NOT EVEN A PRAYER?! IT'S PERVERTED!
WHAT THE HELL'S THAT?! IS THAT MEDICINE?!
THEN WHAT HAVE WE BEEN DOING, EH?!
SHUT THE FUCK UP...
IMBIBING, IT SEEMS, MORI-SENSEI.
YET, IMMORTALITY...? TO HAVE SUCH FANTASY THRUST UPON HIM... AND STILL CHARGE AHEAD? I RESPECT HIS PURITY, I DO.
IMMORTAL-ITY?
IS THIS A FAD...? SOME YOUNG MEN I KNOW SAY THEY MET AN IMMORTAL AND CROSSED SWORDS WITH HIM.
OH HOH ?!
MIZUSHINA-SENSEI, YOU BELIEVE SUCH FAIRY TALES?
IMMORTALITY. HMM...
IF SUCH A THING DOES EXIST...


...IT ISN'T MEDICINE. IT'S SORCERY.
KASHIN KOJI'S GONE?
NOT DRINK-ING AGAIN...?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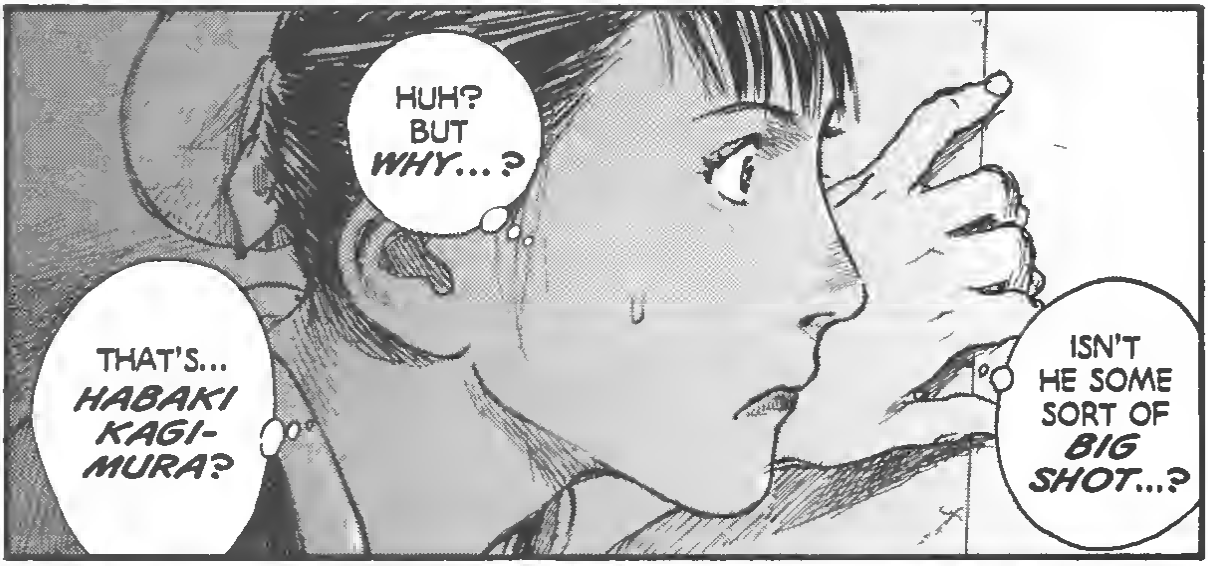
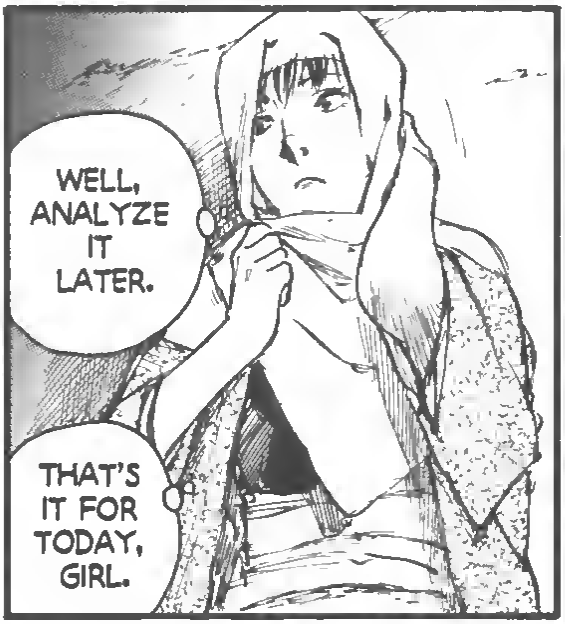
ALL BUT LOW-LEVEL SAMURAI WERE EXPECTED TO HAVE A SPEAR AND AT LEAST ONE RETAINER WITH THEM WHEN THEY REPORTED TO EDO CASTLE.



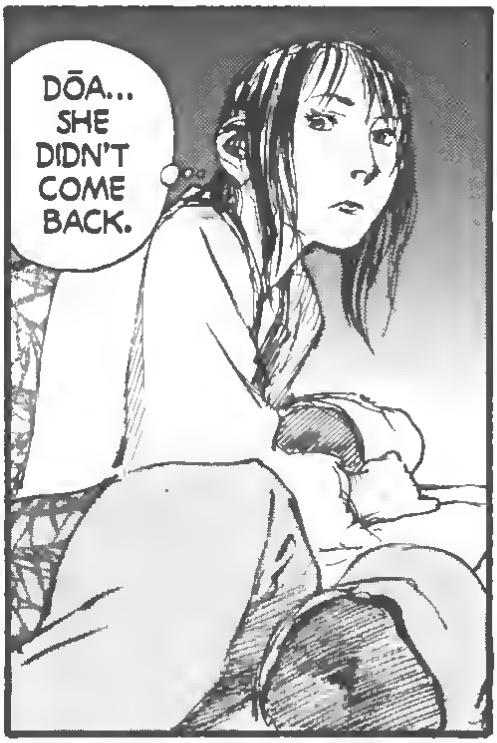


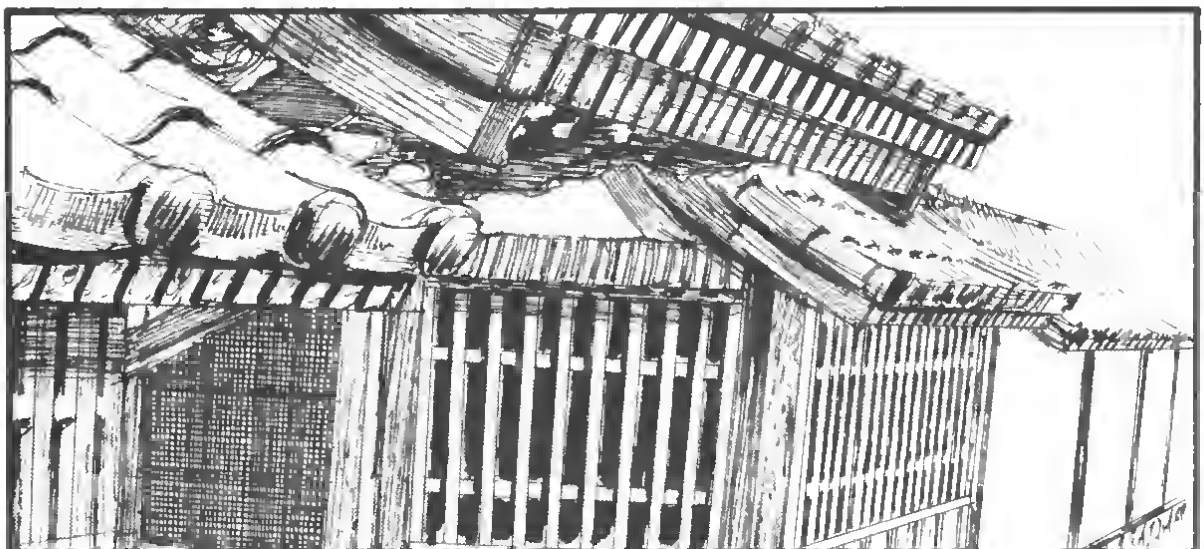
...ALL I CAN SAY FOR SURE IS... HABAKI DIDN'T PLAN TO KILL MANJI.
IF HE'D WANTED THAT, HE WOULD HAVE TOLD ME TO DO IT.
!
AND THEN, I THINK IT'S CERTAIN, TOO...
...THAT MANJI'S NO LONGER IN KAGIMURA'S COMPOUND.
HABAKI HAS A WIFE AND CHILD.
HIDE MANJI FROM *THEM*...? NOT EASY, ESPECIALLY FOR THIS LONG.
WHAT IF HE GOT LOOSE WHEN HABAKI WAS AT THE CASTLE? HE'D BE RISKING HIS FAMILY.
WITH THE *MUGAI-RYŪ* GONE, HABAKI'S DUTIES ARE THE SAME AS ANY OTHER *BANSHŪ*.
IF THERE'S NO CRISIS, GO TO THE CASTLE ON TIME. *LEAVE* ON TIME.
IF THERE'S A DAY HE DOESN'T...

...THEN ON THAT DAY, HE'S WITH MANJI.
THAT'S AS FAR AS I CAN FIGURE IT.
.....
.....
.....
...ONE MORE THING.
FROM NOW ON...
...YOU SHOULD WORK ON YOUR OWN. DON'T ASK HYAKURIN.
WHATEVER ELSE, HABAKI DOESN'T RECOGNIZE YOU.
THAT'S YOUR ONLY STRENGTH.
HYAKURIN MAY FEEL LIKE A SOURCE OF STRENGTH...

...BUT SOME-DAY SHE'LL TIE YOU DOWN.
PUT THAT WAY, I GUESS IT'S TRUE.

AND SO, THAT'S WHAT YOU DIDN'T WANT HER TO HEAR?
I'D THINK "NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS" WOULD HURT HER MORE...
HFF...
TOO WEIRD FOR ME.


DŌA... SHE DIDN'T COME BACK.



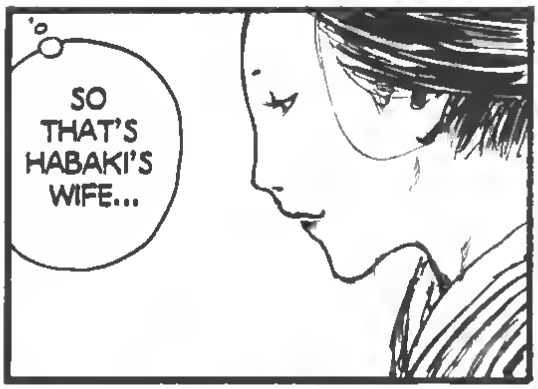
HM?
KENTARŌ. WHAT DO YOU TELL FATHER?

THE BOY STARTS SCHOOL TODAY...
HOH! HE DOES?

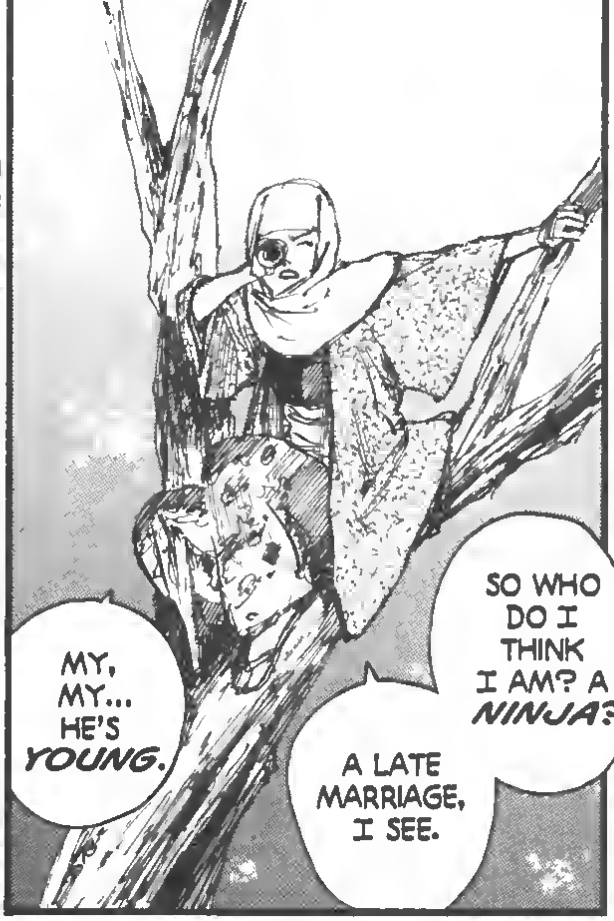
I'M SORRY, KEN-TARŌ.
IF YOUR FATHER HAD MORE TIME...

A BUSY FATHER MAKES KENTARŌ PROUD.

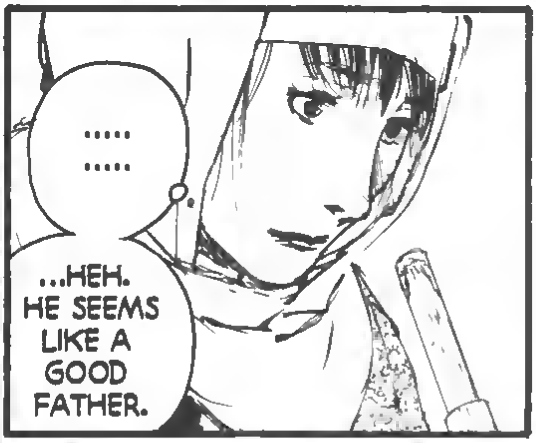
HMF...


SO THAT'S HABAKI'S WIFE...

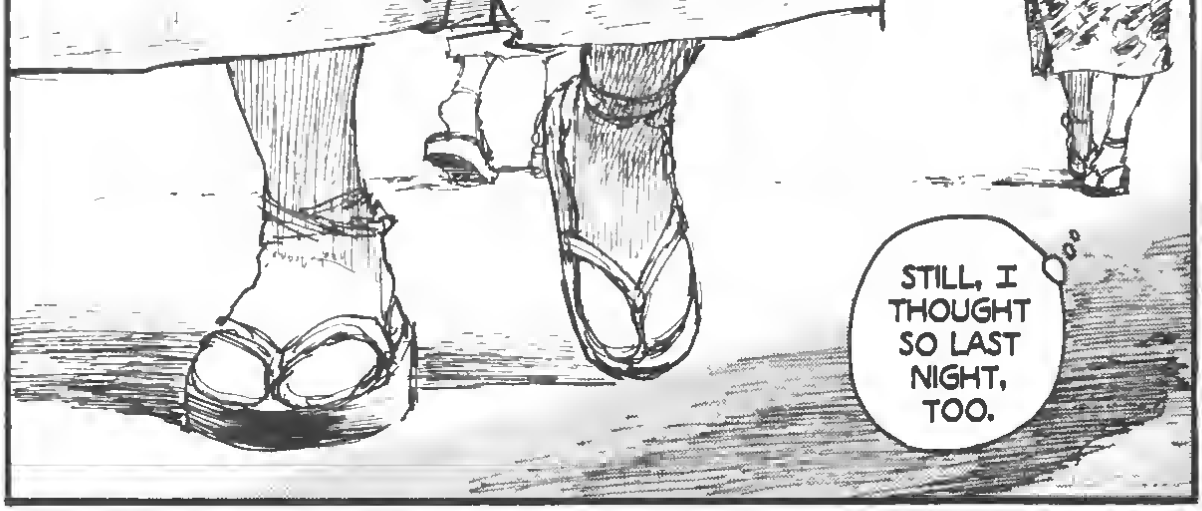
...AND SON.


MY, MY... HE'S YOUNG.
A LATE MARRIAGE, I SEE.
SO WHO DO I THINK I AM? A NINJA?

WELL, IT'S TRUE. IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE HE'S...
...HIDING SOME-ONE.


.....
.....
...HEH. HE SEEMS LIKE A GOOD FATHER.

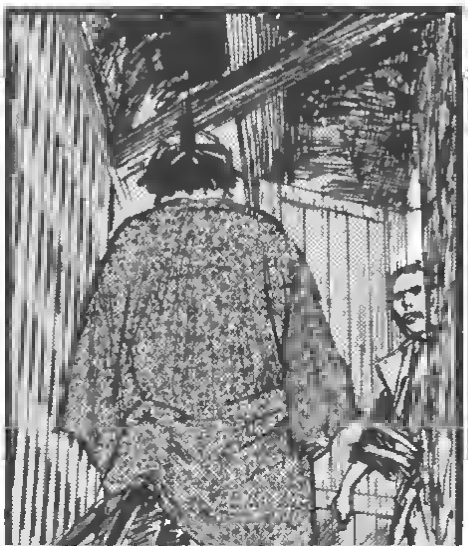
...BUT SHE WON'T GET SENTI-MENTAL.
NOT THIS RIN-SAN.

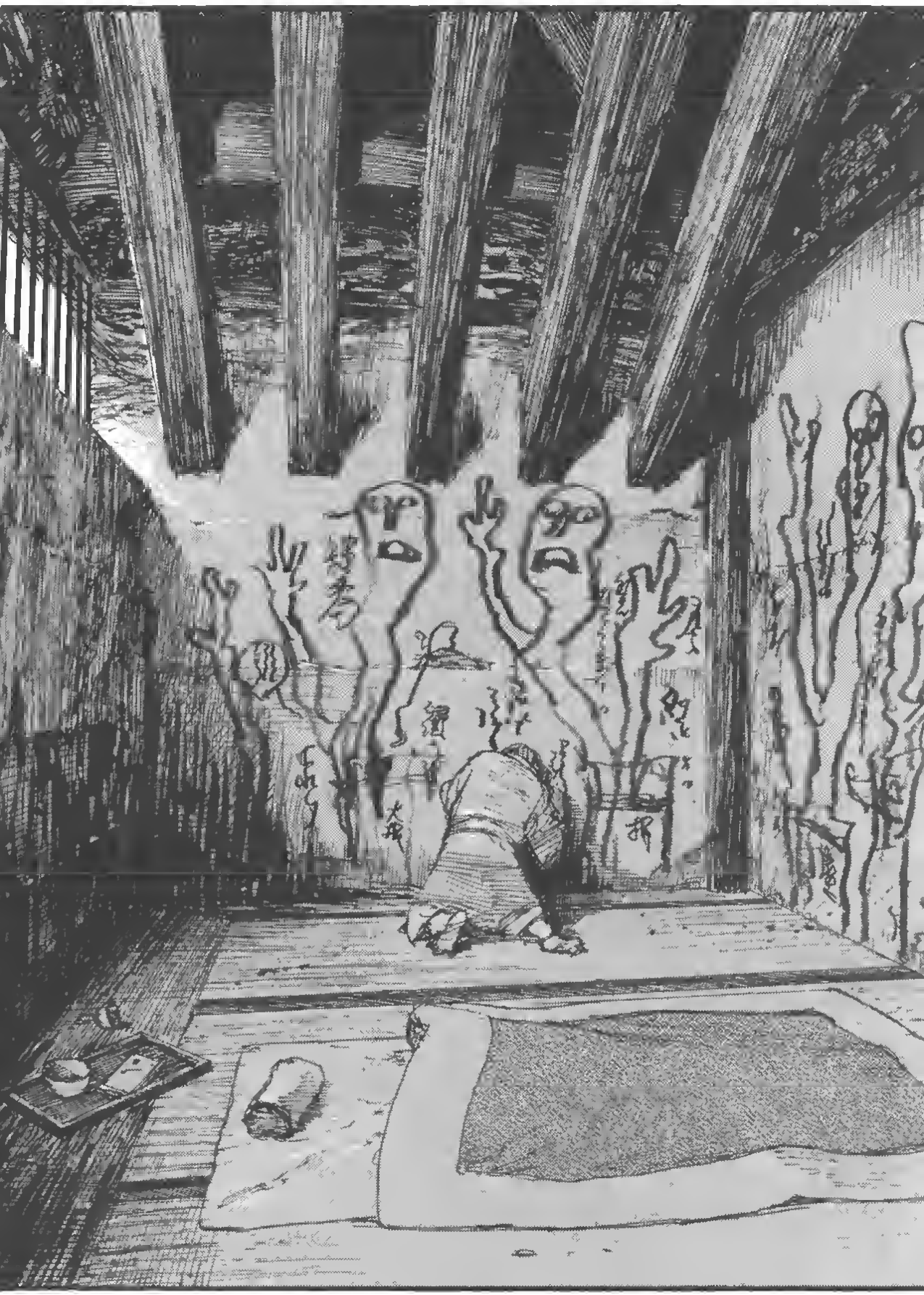

STILL, I THOUGHT SO LAST NIGHT, TOO.

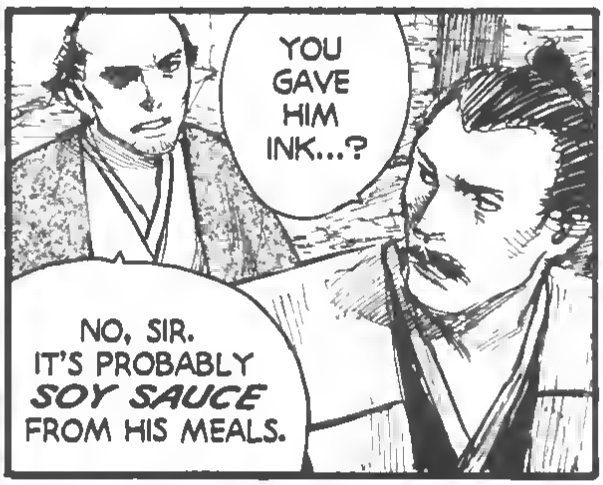
WHY DOES HE WALK AROUND LOOKING LIKE HE BIT INTO A STINK BUG?
HE SEEMED RELAXED AT HOME.

HABAKI-
DONO!
A MINUTE!
?

WHAT
?!






YOU GAVE HIM INK...?
NO, SIR. IT'S PROBABLY SOY SAUCE FROM HIS MEALS.

OH!

.....
.....
SO... IT WAS LIKE HUNTING DUCKS...
HEH.
DUCKS, SIR?
HEH HEH HEH...
THE MEAT TASTES SWEETEST WHEN THE MAGGOTS COME OUT.
TO BE CONTINUED...!

LETTERS

Send letters and fan art to:

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Many thanks to the talented Dan Hipp for contributing another full-color pinup to our monthly offering of bloody madness, sword skills, and medical horror. Dan's been the artistic juggernaut behind *The Amazing Joy Buzzards* (working with writer Mark Smith), and two of his latest releases are the all-ages *What I Did on My Hypergalactic Interstellar Summer Vacation* and the stunning *Gyakushu!* Dan's last *Blade of the Immortal* pinup was the memorable shot of "pincushion Manji" from *Blade* #115. Thanks, Dan! Let's make this a yearly habit, shall we? For a look into Dan's own world of frenetic action sequences and beautiful illustrations, head on over to mrhipp.com after you've left us a message board note at darkhorse.com! Thanks also to Jeff Welborn for his intricate Manji pinup on our inside back cover. We hope to see more from you soon, Jeff!

You may have noticed that Scott Cook has taken over design duties for *Blade of the Immortal*'s English-language single issues and collections. I e-mailed Scott recently to get his thoughts on this series and on a designer's role at Dark Horse Manga . . .

Philip Simon: Out of all of your design duties, what do you enjoy the most?

Scott Cook: You mean besides putting together *Blade of the Immortal* every month? I really enjoy working on one-shot projects or advertisements. Those are the projects where I get to be the most creative.

PS: Having read the entire *Blade of the Immortal* series to prepare you for your work as the book's designer, what are some of your favorite story moments?

SC: Although the swordplay in the series is always incredible, the moments when you really begin to care for the characters are my favorite parts. The chapters when Anotsu and Rin were traveling together were amazing. This current arc really has me feeling for the prisoners and captives that Kagimura is using in his crazy experiments. Poor Dewa! Last month's back cover was an amazing tribute.

PS: What do you like best about Hiroaki Samura's storytelling style? What do you feel he does best?

SC: The subtle hints that he drops throughout the story are AMAZING! Revealing Doa's helmet when Rin knocked her on the head. Isaku crossing his chest. Manji marveling at Dewanosuke's pickpocketing prowess. damn, I miss Dewa!

PS: What are some of your favorite *Blade of the Immortal* covers, and what about them appeals to you?

SC: I am a big fan of the monochromatic covers, like issues #81 and #108. Mr. Samura has caught so much intensity in the characters' expressions, that the single-color environments only add to the drama!

PS: Who's your favorite *Blade* character . . . and why?

SC: I used to be a big fan of Giichi—he was so relentless and unstoppable when he battled Magatsu and that other dude in the "Trickster" story arc, but lately I am really interested in Dōa and what craziness the little firecracker is going to bring to the story.

PS: Can you tell us something about a designer's job? What's the hardest thing (on any book) that you've encountered so far, working here at Dark Horse? What's one thing that NOBODY knows about designers?

SC: A designer has many different responsibilities that can vary from project to project. Sometimes we are simply laying out pages in an interesting manner, and sometimes we have to come up with an entire visual direction for a project. The hardest thing I have worked on so far was laying out the translation for the upcoming *Samurai Champloo* art book Dark Horse is releasing. Even though it is more complex, the written Japanese language is far more *compact* than English! Although I can't speak for every designer out there, everyone I know hates hates HATES overused typefaces. Especially papyrus and bank gothic—those two are the worst!

PS: I know that you enjoy listening to music while you work. I've had Atmosphere's *You Can't Image How Much Fun We're Having* on repeat while working on *Blade* #122. What's been on your headphones recently?

SC: I only allow the greats to permeate my ear holes. Del tha Funkee Homosapien, Little Brother, More or Les, Kool Keith, and Linkin Park keep my creative juices flowing and my head boppin' throughout the day.

Thanks for tolerating the Q&A, Scott! (I'm a big *More or Les* fan, too! Look him up at moreorles.ca!) Scott's "hardest project so far"—Dark Horse's English-language edition of the aforementioned *Samurai Champloo* art book—should be on sale NOW! And don't forget to check out *Ohikkoshi*, Hiroaki Samura's collection of modern-era stories.

NEXT MONTH

BAREFOOT, Part 2 of 5!

Rin's hard work as an amateur spy pays off, and she gets a little closer to Dōa as her quest to find Manji continues. Kagimura's experiments are revitalized, Manji falls into dreamland, and twisted Doc Burando's dreams *come true*. Karukozawa and Toraemon, the "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern" of Samura's savage samurai epic, provide a little comic relief—and we need it! Our color back cover feature for issue #123 is a unique Hiroaki Samura geisha pinup, colored by frequent *Blade of the Immortal* contributor Dan Jackson. See you next month, when this dark tale takes a very strange turn!

—Philip Simon

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

After watching missionaries lay the groundwork for the colonization of the Philippines and other neighboring corners of Asia, Tokugawa Jeyasu formerly banned Christianity in 1614, deporting missionaries and killing Christians who refused to renounce their faith. Revolts by Christian believers were brutally suppressed, and surviving believers went underground, concealing crucifixes and other signs of their faith from the authorities. In a remote corner of distant Hokkaido, Isaku's father appears to have escaped the brutal repression.

"The meat tastes sweetest when the *maggots* come out." Kagimura's notion is that duck (and other wild animals) have a strong, gamey taste and texture and should be hung out to essentially rot a while before eaten. He's referring to Burando's state of mind, and not the *kessen-chu*. Burando was "afflicted" with ethical doubts and compassion before his return to prison. Now, he's essentially gone mad (rotten, the maggots have come out), and Kagimura senses that all of the old human feelings aren't going to be getting in Burando's way any more.

GLOSSARY

Bangashira: Head of the *banshū*.

Banshū: Officers serving under the shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the shogun himself.

Cho: Section of a city.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts, here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Dono: Archaic honorific used to show respect, usually for someone of a higher rank.

Edo: Capital of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo.

Goten-i: Doctors employed by the feudal lords who served under the shogun.

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Kirishitan: A Christian.

Mugai-ryū: A group of criminals who worked as assassins for the shogunate, earning their freedom by killing assigned targets. Recently disbanded by Habaki Kagimura.

Mutenichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Ōbanya: Arrestees were taken to one of Edo's seven *ōbanya*, sometimes known as *shirabe banya*, where they would be detained for questioning and rougher forms of interrogation to determine whether the police had a legitimate case against them or not. Those not cleared were sent on to the Kodenma-chō prison for further interrogation.

Ryu: A sword school.

Taisei: Europe.

Tomizutsu: Literally, a "far sight tube." Today's telescope.

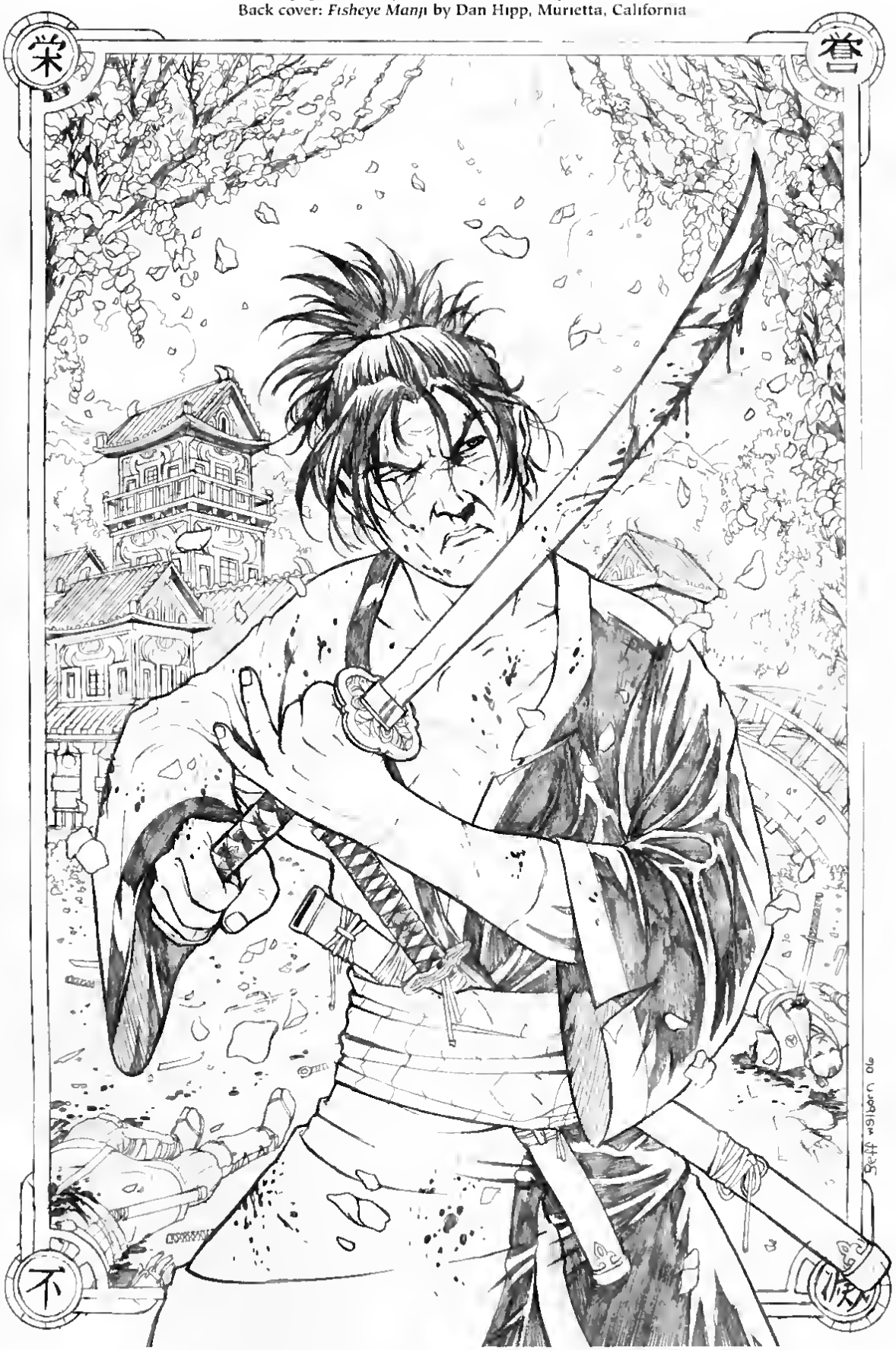
ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork. The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue. Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

PINUPS!!

This page: *Manji* by Jeff Welborn, Shreveport, Louisiana
Back cover: *Fisheye Manji* by Dan Hipp, Murietta, California



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OKAY BUT I DON'T REALLY LOOK LIKE THAT, RIGHT?
NO, THAT'S PRETTY MUCH IT

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